

**Communicable Disease Epidemiology  
and Immunization Section**

401 Fifth Avenue South, Suite 900  
Seattle, WA 98104-1818

**206-296-4774** Fax 206-296-4803

TTY Relay: 711

[www.kingcounty.gov/health](http://www.kingcounty.gov/health)

## **Health Advisory: Potential Exposure to Avian Psittacosis from Birds Purchased at Petsmart Stores Since October 1, 2007**

**Date: January 2, 2008**

### **Action Requested**

- **Be aware of symptoms of psittacosis: fever, headache, chills, myalgias and cough**
- **Ask patients with compatible symptoms about exposure to birds purchased at Petsmart between October 1, 2007 and December 19, 2007**
- **For suspected cases:**
  - **Report suspected cases to Public Health at (206) 296-4774**
  - **Send serum for *Chlamydophila psittaci* IgM and IgG to the Washington State Public Health Laboratory after consultation with Public Health**

### **Background**

Psittacosis (also known as parrot fever or ornithosis when it occurs in people, or avian chlamydiosis when it occurs in birds) is an uncommon illness caused by infection with the bacteria *Chlamydophila psittaci*. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention notified public health agencies that potentially infected birds were shipped to Petsmart stores throughout the country from a distributor in Florida, mostly during October 2007. Linked to this vendor are now several cases of avian psittacosis nationally and one confirmed human case in a Minnesota pet store employee.

Psittacosis is transmitted from infected birds through inhaling the bacteria in dried bird droppings and feather dust, such as when cleaning a bird cage. It can also be spread through bird bites, mouth-to-beak contact and handling feathers and tissues from infected birds. The incubation period ranges from 5 days to 4 weeks, but is typically around 10 days. The spectrum of illness ranges from asymptomatic to severe pneumonia. Elderly and immunosuppressed people are most susceptible to infection. The organism is not spread from person to person.

Public Health recommends that health care providers consider the diagnosis of psittacosis in persons with exposure to birds (as pets or by occupation) and with compatible symptoms of fever, headache, chills, myalgias, and cough with or without pneumonia. For suspected cases, diagnosis can be confirmed by acute and convalescent sera for *Chlamydophila* IgG and IgM drawn at least 2 weeks apart. A single reciprocal IgM titer  $\geq 16$  by microimmunofluorescence is also diagnostic. Testing can be done at the Washington State Public Health Laboratory. Please report suspected cases to Public Health at (206) 296-4774. Treatment for human cases is typically a 10-14 day course of doxycycline or tetracycline; erythromycin is an alternative for individuals for whom tetracyclines are contraindicated.

### **Resources**

Public Health Psittacosis Factsheet: [www.metrokc.gov/health/prevcont/psittacosis.htm](http://www.metrokc.gov/health/prevcont/psittacosis.htm)

Compendium of measures to control *Chlamydophila psittaci* from the National Association of Public Health Veterinarians: [www.avma.org/pubhlth/psittacosis.asp](http://www.avma.org/pubhlth/psittacosis.asp)